

HALAKHA

That city...and all of its surrounding areas – אותה – והעיר: If a specific city is visited by a calamity, the people living there must fast and cry out by blowing the *shofar*. The residents of the surrounding areas must also fast, but they do not cry out, in accordance with the opinion of the first *tanna* of the mishna (*Shulhan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 576:1, 12).

If a city is afflicted by pestilence – עיר שיש בה דבר – If a city is struck by a plague of pestilence, its residents must fast and cry out. What is considered a plague of pestilence? If a city has an able-bodied male population of five hundred, and three men die from the disease over a period of three days, one each day, the city is treated as having been struck by a plague. Some commentaries note that fasts were not observed in their day during periods of plague, due to the concern that those who refrain from eating and drinking would weaken themselves and render themselves more susceptible to disease (*Magen Avraham, Shulhan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 576:1–2).

Collapsing buildings – מפולת – If there is an increase in collapsing buildings for no apparent reason in a certain city, or if a place is struck by an earthquake or a storm that causes buildings to collapse, the residents of that city must fast and cry out (*Shulhan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 576:4).

For the following they cry out in every place – על אלו מתריעין בכל מקום – If the crops in a certain area are struck by blight or mildew, even if only a small amount of grain is affected, or if the area is struck by locusts or any other type of calamity that can easily spread from one place to another, fasts must be proclaimed and they cry out everywhere. This includes places far from the stricken area, provided that they are in the same country (*Shulhan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 576:8–9, and in the comment of Rema, citing Ran).

Blight – שדפון – The court decrees fasts for blight and mildew, even if what appears is enough to fill only the mouth of an oven (*Shulhan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 576:8).

For the following they cry out even on Shabbat – על אלו מתריעין בשבת – On Shabbat and Festivals, fasts are not observed, there is no crying out, and no special prayers are recited for any type of calamity, with the following exceptions: If the community faces serious difficulties concerning earning a livelihood, they may include special prayers even on Shabbat. Likewise, if a city is threatened by an enemy army or by floodwaters, or if an individual is in a life-threatening situation, special prayers may be recited even on Shabbat. Nevertheless, the *shofar* may not be sounded, except to summon help (*Shulhan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 288:9, 576:12–13).

אותה העיר מתענה ומתרת, וכל סביבותיה מתענות ולא מתריעות. רבי עקיבא אומר: מתריעות ולא מתענות. וכן עיר שיש בה דבר או מפולת, אותה העיר מתענה ומתרת, וכל סביבותיה מתענות ולא מתריעות. רבי עקיבא אומר: מתריעות ולא מתענות.

איזהו דבר? עיר המוציאה חמש מאות רגלי, ויצאו ממנה שלשה מתים בשלשה ימים זה אחר זה – הרי זה דבר. פחות מכאן, אין זה דבר.

על אלו מתריעין בכל מקום: על השדפון, ועל הירקון, ועל הארבה, ועל החסיל, ועל החיה רעה, ועל החרב. מתריעין עליה, מפני שהיא מכה מהלכת.

מעשה שירדו זקנים מירושלים לעריהם, וגזרו תענית על שגראה כמלא פי תנור שדפון באשקלון. ועוד גזרו תענית על שאכלו זאבים שני תינוקות בעבר הידן. רבי יוסי אומר: לא על שאכלו, אלא על שגראו.

על אלו מתריעין בשבת: על עיר שהקיפוה נכרים או נהר, ועל הספינה המיטרפת ביים. רבי יוסי אומר: לעודה, ולא לעקה. שמעון התימני אומר: אף על הדבר. ולא הודו לו חכמים.

In a case of this kind, that city fasts and cries out^N by blowing the *shofar*, and all of its surrounding areas^H join them in their fast, but they do not cry out. Rabbi Akiva disagrees and says: They cry out but they do not fast. The mishna continues: And likewise, if a city is afflicted by pestilence^H or collapsing buildings,^H that city fasts and cries out, and all of its surrounding areas fast but they do not cry out. Rabbi Akiva says: They cry out but they do not fast.

The mishna inquires: What is considered a plague of pestilence? When is a series of deaths treated as a plague? The mishna answers: If a city that sends out five hundred infantrymen, i.e., it has a population of five hundred able-bodied men, and three dead are taken out of it on three consecutive days, this is a plague of pestilence, which requires fasting and crying out. If the death rate is lower than that, this is not pestilence.

For the following calamities they cry out in every place:^H For blight; for mildew; for locusts; for caterpillars, a type of locust that comes in large swarms and descends upon a certain place; for dangerous beasts that have entered a town; and for the sword, i.e., legions of an invading army. The reason that they cry out about these misfortunes in every place is because these are calamities that spread.

An incident occurred in which Elders descended from Jerusalem to their cities throughout Eretz Yisrael and decreed a fast throughout the land because there was seen in the city of Ashkelon a small amount of blight,^H enough to fill the mouth of an oven. This fast was observed throughout Eretz Yisrael, as blight spreads quickly. And furthermore, they decreed a fast because wolves had eaten two children in Transjordan. Rabbi Yosei says: This fast was decreed not because they ate the children, but because these wolves were merely seen in an inhabited area.

For the following calamities they cry out^N even on Shabbat:^{HN} For a city that is surrounded by gentile troops, or for a place in danger of being flooded by a river that has swelled its banks, or for a ship tossed about at sea. Rabbi Yosei said: One may cry out on Shabbat to summon help, but it may not be sounded for crying out to God. Shimon the Timnite says: One may cry out on Shabbat even for pestilence, but the Rabbis did not agree with him.

NOTES

That city fasts and cries out – אותה העיר מתענה ומתרת: Rashi explains that people living in the outlying areas must also fast, as they are indirectly affected by the lack of rain in the neighboring city. If there is no rainfall in the city, its residents will go to purchase food in the outlying areas, causing food shortages and higher prices.

Other commentaries suggest that the residents of surrounding areas must participate in the distress affecting their neighbors in the city and offer prayers on their behalf (Rabbeinu Yehonatan).

In the Jerusalem Talmud, the dispute between the anonymous first *tanna* of the mishna and Rabbi Akiva is explained as follows: The first *tanna* of the mishna derives the regulations that apply to those living outside the stricken city from the *halakhot* of Yom Kippur, on which fasting is required but the *shofar* is not sounded. Conversely, Rabbi Akiva derives these regulations from the *halakhot* of Rosh HaShana, on which the *shofar* is sounded but a fast is not observed.

For the following they cry out – על אלו מתריעין: Some commentaries note that the list in the mishna is incomplete, possibly because it mentions only the more common situations. They cite

several talmudic sources that refer to other calamities for which they cry out even on Shabbat (*Gevurat Ari*).

For the following they cry out even on Shabbat – על אלו מתריעין בשבת: In Chapter One (14a), the Gemara argued that the mishna cannot mean that the *shofar* is sounded on Shabbat over these calamities, as blowing a *shofar* is prohibited on Shabbat. Rather, the first *tanna* of the mishna permits the recitation of the *Aneinu* prayer, recited on fasts, even on Shabbat. Rabbi Yosei disagrees, claiming that although people may cry out for help in times of danger, they may not submit a formal prayer over their distress, as there is no assurance that their prayers will be effective (see Rashi).

Many early authorities maintain that the term cry out usually means that the *shofar* is sounded as part of the observance of a fast. Yet even they agree that in this instance it does not imply the proclamation of a fast, as a fast may not be declared on Shabbat.

However, according to one reading of the Rambam, a fast must be proclaimed even on Shabbat if the community is threatened with one of the calamities listed in the mishna (Rambam *Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Ta'anit* 1:6).

Except for an overabundance of rain – חוץ מרוב גשמים – Fasts are not proclaimed in Eretz Yisrael in times of excessive rainfall, except in places where there is concern that the water might cause buildings to collapse (*Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 576:11*).

NOTES

If the Claimants' Stone has been washed away – אם נמחית – אבן הטועין: This refers to a large stone located in Jerusalem that served as the center for announcements concerning lost property (see *Bava Metzia 28b*). It is called the Claimants' Stone in reference to the claims that were put forward with regard to lost objects.

Some commentaries maintain that the entire phrase means: If the Claimants' Stone has been covered i.e., when this stone is covered with water it is time to cease praying for rain, as this level of water indicates that abundant rain had already fallen (Rashi in *Bava Metzia*; Rambam; Meiri).

Tosafot in *Bava Metzia* cite the Jerusalem Talmud, in which the verb *to'in* means obliteration. According to this interpretation, Honi HaMe'agel was using hyperbole to inform his listeners that just as water cannot dissolve the Claimants' Stone, I cannot annul the blessed arrival of rain.

LANGUAGE

Nag [*mithatei*] – מתחטא: Although many commentaries have argued that the term is derived from the root *h-t-a*, to sin, this interpretation is difficult to accept in this context. Others maintain that it is from the Arabic *حظي*, *haziya*, which means to obtain things by imploring. If so, *mithatei* means to beg, implore, and indulge oneself.

על כל צרה שלא תבוא על הצבור מתריעין עליהן, חוץ מרוב גשמים. מעשה שאמרו לו לחזני המעגל: התפלל שירדו גשמים. אמר להם: צאו והכניסו תנורי פסחים בשביל שלא ימוקו. התפלל, ולא ירדו גשמים.

מה עשה? עג עוגה ועמד בתוכה, ואמר לפניו: רבוננו של עולם! בניך שמו פניהם עלי, שאני כבן בית לפניך. נשבוע אני בשמך הגדול שאני זו מכאן עד שתרחם על בניך. התחילו גשמים מנטפין. אמר: לא כך שאלתי, אלא גשמי בורות, שיחין, ומערות. התחילו לירד בועין. אמר: לא כך שאלתי, אלא גשמי רצון, ברכה, ונדבה.

ירדו בתקנתו, עד שיצאו ישראל מירושלים להר הבית מפני הגשמים. באו ואמרו לו: כשם שהתפללת עליהם שירדו, כך התפלל שילכו לך. אמר להם: צאו וראו אם נמחית אבן הטועין.

שלא לו שמעון בן שטח: אלמלא חזני אתה, גוזרני עליך נידוי. אבל מה אעשה לך, שאתה מתחטא לפני המקום, ועושה לך רצונך, כבן שהוא מתחטא על אביו, ועושה לו רצונו? ועליך הקתוב אומר: "ישמח אביך ואמך, ותגיל יולדתך."

היו מתעניין, וירדו להם גשמים קודם הנץ החמה, לא ישלמו. לאחר הנץ החמה, ישלמו. רבי אליעזר אומר: קודם חצות, לא ישלמו. לאחר חצות, ישלמו.

The mishna adds: In general, they cry out on account of any trouble that should not befall the community, a euphemism for trouble that may befall the community, except for an overabundance of rain.^H Although too much rain may be disastrous, one does not cry out over it, because rain is a sign of a blessing. The mishna relates: An incident occurred in which the people said to Honi HaMe'agel: Pray that rain should fall. He said to them: Go out and bring in the clay ovens used to roast the Paschal lambs, so that they will not dissolve in the water, as torrential rains are certain to fall. He prayed, and no rain fell at all.

What did he do? He drew a circle on the ground and stood inside it and said before God: Master of the Universe, Your children have turned their faces toward me, as I am like a member of Your household. Therefore, I take an oath by Your great name that I will not move from here until You have mercy upon Your children and answer their prayers for rain. Rain began to trickle down, but only in small droplets. He said: I did not ask for this, but for rain to fill the cisterns, ditches, and caves with enough water to last the entire year. Rain began to fall furiously. He said: I did not ask for this damaging rain either, but for rain of benevolence, blessing, and generosity.

Subsequently, the rains fell in their standard manner but continued unabated, filling the city with water until all of the Jews exited the residential areas of Jerusalem and went to the Temple Mount due to the rain. They came and said to him: Just as you prayed over the rains that they should fall, so too, pray that they should stop. He said to them: Go out and see if the Claimants' Stone, a large stone located in the city, upon which proclamations would be posted with regard to lost and found articles, has been washed away.^N In other words, if the water has not obliterated the Claimants' Stone, it is not yet appropriate to pray for the rain to cease.

Shimon ben Shetaḥ,^P the *Nasi* of the Sanhedrin at the time, relayed to Honi HaMe'agel: Were you not Honi, I would have decreed that you be ostracized, but what can I do to you? You nag [*mithatei*]^L God and He does your bidding, like a son who nags his father and his father does his bidding without reprimand. After all, rain fell as you requested. About you, the verse states: "Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her who bore you rejoice" (Proverbs 23:25).

The mishna teaches another *halakha* with regard to fast days: If they were fasting for rain, and rain fell for them before sunrise, they need not complete their fast until the evening. However, if it fell after sunrise, they must complete their fast. Rabbi Eliezer says: If rain fell before midday, they need not complete their fast; but if it rains after midday, they must complete their fast.

PERSONALITIES

Shimon ben Shetaḥ – שמעון בן שטח: The *Nasi* of the Sanhedrin during the reign of Alexander Yannai, Shimon ben Shetaḥ was one of the most important Jewish leaders and exponents of the Oral Law. He was an authoritative leader who insisted on observing the minutiae of Torah law. He took vigorous action against anyone who challenged the authority of the accepted *halakha*, whether the challenge came from outside the Jewish community or from sectarians of all kinds within.

In his time, witchcraft was expunged from the land by means

of special decrees, and he firmly established the *halakhot* of testimony. He also improved and reinforced marriage contracts. Since he insisted on the overarching power of the Sanhedrin, he even summoned the king to judgment, and demanded that he respect the court like an ordinary citizen.

For this and many other reasons, he came into conflict with Alexander Yannai and was forced to go into hiding on several occasions. However, as evident from the account in *Berakhot* (48a), he did not succumb to threats, honor, or flattery. When

people took revenge against him and testified falsely against his son, he and his son accepted punishment so as not to invalidate the established *halakhot*.

Although his sister, Salome Alexandra, was the king's wife, Shimon ben Shetaḥ continued to practice his profession, which was apparently tanning leather. After the death of Alexander Yannai, his widow reigned, and internal affairs were handled by Shimon ben Shetaḥ. This was considered a time of tranquility in every respect.

Where they produced stalks – דאָקון: The phenomena described here are connected with various stages in the desiccation of plants. Sometimes a temporary water deficit of 5–10 percent afflicts a plant. This deficit can occur in the summer, in which case it does not impair the plant's growth. However, a water deficit of 30 percent will cause permanent blight, which weakens the plant and causes its leaves to shrivel. If that condition lasts no longer than a short while, the plant will revive if water is supplied. However, if this blight continues for some time, notwithstanding any temporary recovery, the absorptive capacity of the roots will be impaired and the plant will die.

מַעֲשֵׂה שְׁגוּרוֹ תַעֲנִית בְּלוֹד, וַיִּרְדּוּ לָהֶם גְּשָׁמִים קֹדֶם הַצּוֹת. אָמַר לָהֶם רַבִּי טַרְפוֹן: צֵאוּ, וְאָכְלוּ וּשְׁתּוּ, וַעֲשׂוּ יוֹם טוֹב, וַיֵּצְאוּ, וְאָכְלוּ וּשְׁתּוּ, וַעֲשׂוּ יוֹם טוֹב, וּבָאוּ בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים וְקִרְאוּ הַלֵּל הַגָּדוֹל.

גַּמ' "סֵדֶר תַעֲנִיּוֹת הָאֵלוֹ הָאֵמֹר בְּרַבִּיעָה רִאשׁוֹנָה, וְרַבִּיעָה שְׁנִינִי: רַבִּיעָה רִאשׁוֹנָה וְשְׁנִינִי, לְשִׁאֵל; שְׁלִישִׁית, לְהַתְעַנּוֹת.

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה: הֲכִי קָאָמַר: סֵדֶר תַעֲנִיּוֹת הָאֵמֹר אֵימָתִי? בּוֹמֵן שְׁיִצְאָה רַבִּיעָה רִאשׁוֹנָה, וְשְׁנִינִי, וְשְׁלִישִׁית, וְלֹא יִרְדּוּ גְשָׁמִים. אֲבָל יִרְדּוּ גְשָׁמִים בְּרַבִּיעָה רִאשׁוֹנָה, וְזָרְעוּ וְלֹא צָמְחוּ, אִי נִמִּי צָמְחוּ וְחִזְרוּ וְנִשְׁתַּנְּנוּ, מִתְרַעֲוִין עֲלֵיהֶן מִיָּד.

אָמַר רַב נַחֲמָן: דּוֹקָא נִשְׁתַּנְּנוּ, אֲבָל יִבְשׁוּ, לֹא פְּשִׁיטָא, "נִשְׁתַּנְּנוּ" תַּנּוּ! לֹא, צְרִיכָא דְאֶקוּן. מַהוּ דְתִימָא אֶקְנֵתָא מִלְּתָא הִיא. קַמִּשְׁמַע לָן.

"וְכֵן שְׁפָסְקוּ גְשָׁמִים בֵּין גְּשֵׁם לְגְשֵׁם" כּו'. מֵאֵי "מִכַּת בְּצוֹרֶת"? אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: מִכַּת הַמְּבִיאָה לְיַד בְּצוֹרֶת. אָמַר רַב נַחֲמָן: נַהֲרָא אֲנַהֲרָא

The mishna relates: **An incident occurred in which the court decreed a fast in Lod due to a lack of rain, and rain fell for them before midday. Rabbi Tarfon said to the people: Go out, and eat, and drink, and treat this day as a Festival. And they went out, and ate, and drank, and treated the day as a Festival, and in the afternoon they came to the synagogue and recited the great hallel, to thank God for answering their prayers.**

GEMARA The mishna taught: **The order of these fasts is stated only when the fast concerns the first rainfall.^N And the Gemara raises a contradiction between this statement and the following baraita:** If the periods of the **first and second rainfall** pass without rain, this is the time to ask and pray for rain; if the **third** passes without rain, this is the time to fast.

Rav Yehuda said that **this is what the mishna is saying: When does the order of these fasts that is stated apply? When the periods of the first, second, and third rainfall have passed and rain has not fallen. However, if rain fell in the time of the first rainfall, and the people sowed but the plants did not sprout, or, alternatively, if they sprouted a little, but their appearance changed back for the worse, as no rain fell after the first rainfall, they cry out about it immediately.**

Rav Nahman said: This applies **specifically** if their appearance **changed. However**, if they dried out entirely, they do **not** cry out, as this condition cannot be improved. The Gemara asks: **It is obvious** that this is the case, because in the mishna **we learned** the word **changed**. The Gemara answers: **No**, it is **necessary** for Rav Nahman to issue his statement with regard to a case **where they produced stalks^{BN}** after they dried out. **Lest you say that producing stalks is a matter of significance**, as it is a sign of strengthening, and the crops might be saved through prayer, Rav Nahman therefore **teaches us** that this is not the case.

The mishna further taught: **And likewise, if rain ceased for a period of forty days between one rainfall and another, they cry out about this, because it is a plague of drought.** The Gemara asks: **What is the meaning of the phrase: A plague of drought? Isn't this simply a drought?** Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: The mishna means that a period of forty days between one rainfall and the next **is a plague that may cause a drought.** In this regard, Rav Nahman said: When crops do not grow in one place due to lack of rain and must be imported by means of one **river to another river,^N**

NOTES

For the first rainfall – בְּרַבִּיעָה רִאשׁוֹנָה: Some commentaries explain that the expression: The first rainfall, can be used in two different senses. It might refer to the first rain of the season, which itself can be divided into several separate rainfalls. However, it can also refer to the very first rainfall of the season (Ritva). The Gemara first understood the mishna as referring to the first rainfall according to the second sense, and therefore it raised the objection from another tannaitic source, which states that the fasts do not begin until the time of the third rainfall. Rav Yehuda answered that the mishna is using the term according to the first sense. In other words, the mishna is saying that the fasts do not begin until all the rains of the first rainfall have failed to arrive on time.

לֹא – לְאֵי דְאֶקוּן: The early commentaries concur that *akkun* refers to some sort of positive development in the growth of plants. However, they disagree over the precise meaning of the term. Some maintain that it is derived from the root *kaneh*, stalk, i.e., the plants produced stalks after (Rashi) or before (Ra'avad) they dried up.

Others derive the term from the root *t-k-n*, improve, explaining that the plants showed some sign of improvement after they had already dried up (Rabbeinu Gershom). Rabbeinu Hananel and others similarly suggest that after the plants had already dried

up, they once again turned green. Rabbeinu Hananel, citing the *ge'onim*, further writes that after the plants had dried up, they became strong again.

Regardless of their precise interpretation of the phrase, most early commentaries understand the Gemara as follows: The ruling of the mishna applies only if the crops have started to grow strangely, in which case they might recover. However, if the crops dried up completely, even if they subsequently produce stalks, improve, turn green, or become stronger, there is no point in crying out, as there is no longer any chance of saving them, and therefore any prayers offered for them would be in vain.

Rashi suggests another interpretation: The mishna's ruling applies if the crops start to grow strangely, in which case they must cry out so that the plants may recover. However, if the crops have dried up, even if they already produced stalks beforehand there is no need to cry out, as they will recover on their own.

River to river – נַהֲרָא אֲנַהֲרָא: Rashi explains that Rav Nahman distinguishes between drought, when it is possible to transport food from another region by river, and famine, when it is necessary to transport food by land. Rashi suggests a second interpretation, that a drought means that one river has dried up, although water can be diverted from a different river, whereas at a time of famine all the rivers in the region have dried up.

בצורתא; מדינתא אמדינתא. כפנא.
ואמר רבי חנינא: סאה בסלע, ושכיחא.
בצורתא; ארבעה, ולא שכיחא. כפנא.

אמר רבי יוחנן: לא שנו אלא בזמן
שהמעות בזול ופירות ביוקר. אבל
מעות ביוקר ופירות בזול, מתריעין עליה
מיד. דאמר רבי יוחנן: נהירנא בד הו
קיימי ארבעה סאין בסלע, והו נמישי
נפיהי כפן בטבריא, מדלית איסר.

”ירדו לצמחין אבל לא לאילן”. בשלמא
לצמחים ולא לאילן – משכחת לה
דאתא נחא, ולא אתאי רינא. לאילן
ולא לצמחין – דאתאי רינא, ולא אתאי
נחא.

לזה ולזה, אבל לא לבורות, ולא לשיחין
ומערות – משכחת לה, דאתאי רינא
ומחא, מיהו טובא לא אתאי. אלא הא
דתנא: ירדו לבורות, לשיחין, ולמערות,
אבל לא לזה ולזה, היכי משכחת לה?
דאתאי בשפיכותא.

תנו רבנן: מתריעין על האילנות בפרוס
הפסח. על הבורות, ושיחין, ומערות,
בפרוס החג. ואם אין להן מים לשתות,
מתריעין עליהן מיד.

ואיהו מיד שלהן? שני, וחמישי, ושני.
ועל בולן אין מתריעין עליהן אלא
באפרכיא שלהן.

this is considered a drought. If produce must be brought from one province to another province, this is considered a famine.^N And Rabbi Ḥanina said: If a *se'a* of grain is sold for a *sela*, but it is available, this is considered a drought. Although prices have risen, there is still grain for those who can afford it. However, if four *se'a* of grain is sold for a *sela*, and it is not available, this is considered a famine.

Rabbi Yoḥanan said: They taught this only with regard to a time when money is cheap and everyone has it, and produce is expensive.^N However, when money is expensive, i.e., unavailable, and produce is cheap, they cry out about it immediately, as this is considered a famine. As Rabbi Yoḥanan said: I remember when four *se'a* of produce were sold for one *sela*, and yet there were many swollen by famine in Tiberias, as they did not have even one *issar* with which to purchase food.

§ The mishna taught: If sufficient rain fell for the vegetation but not enough fell for the trees; if it was enough for the trees but not for the vegetation; or if sufficient rain fell for both this and that, i.e., vegetation and trees, but not enough to fill the cisterns, ditches, and caves with water to last the summer, they cry out about it immediately. The Gemara comments: Granted, with regard to rain that fell in sufficient quantities for the vegetation but not for the trees, this case can be found, e.g., if gentle rain fell but heavy rain did not fall, this is insufficient for the trees. Furthermore, it is possible for enough rain to fall for the trees but it is not effective for the vegetation, if heavy rain fell but gentle rain did not fall.

Likewise, in the case of rain that benefits both this and that, trees and vegetation, but not cisterns, ditches, and caves, you can find this too, if both heavy and gentle rain fell, however, they did not fall in abundance, and therefore the water in the cisterns will not last through the summer. However, that which is taught in a *baraita*: If sufficient rain fell for cisterns, ditches, and caves, but not for either this or that, i.e., trees or plants, how can you find these circumstances? If the rain is enough to fill cisterns, how could it not be enough for plants and trees? The Gemara answers: Where rain comes in a single downpour,^B it will fill the cisterns but will provide no benefit to plants and trees.

The Sages taught: They cry out about trees that have not received enough rain, until near Passover,^{NH} as beyond that time any rain will no longer benefit trees. However, they sound the alarm over cisterns, ditches and caves that have not been filled until before the festival of *Sukkot*.^N And at any time, if they have no water to drink, they sound the alarm over them immediately.

And what exactly is the meaning of their use of: Immediately, in these cases? Monday, Thursday, and Monday of the week in which the court became aware of the crisis, but not necessarily on the very day that it became evident. And in all of these cases of interrupted rainfall, they sound the alarm over them only in their district [*iparkheya*],¹ but not in other areas where rain is falling normally.

HALAKHA

About trees near Passover – על האילנות בפרוס הפסח: If Passover is approaching and rain has not fallen in sufficient quantities in order for the trees to produce their fruits, fasts are proclaimed and special prayers recited until adequate rain falls or the rainy season has passed. Likewise, if *Sukkot* is

approaching and the storage cisterns contain little water, fasts must be observed until there is adequate rainfall. If there is a shortage of drinking water, fasts are proclaimed at any time of the year, even during the summer months (*Shulḥan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 575:8).

NOTES

From province to province, a famine – מדינתא אמדינתא. כפנא: Some commentaries explain that this means water has to be brought from one place to another (Rabbeinu Gershom). Others state that as long as produce can be transported by river, it is not called a famine. However, once it has to be carried overland by donkeys and the like, this creates a shortage that leads to famine (Meiri).

When money is cheap and produce is expensive – בזמן: Rabbi Ḥanina's distinction between drought and famine parallels Rabbi Yoḥanan's distinction between a case where money is cheap and produce is expensive and a case where money is expensive and produce is cheap (Ritva). In all these cases, the alarm is sounded immediately, as the mishna indicates that if the alarm is sounded for drought it must also be sounded for the more desperate situation of famine. Consequently, Rabbi Yoḥanan's assertion that the Sages instituted their ordinance only when money is cheap and produce is expensive, but not vice versa, cannot mean that the alarm was not sounded when produce is expensive. Rather, he maintains that the Sages did not need to issue their regulation in that case, as the *halakha* when produce is expensive is obvious.

Near Passover – בפרוס הפסח: The precise meaning of the term in this context is unclear. The Gemara elsewhere (*Bekhorot* 58a), explains that the expression: Near Passover, refers to the first of Nisan, the midpoint of the thirty-day period before Passover, during which the *halakhot* pertaining to the Festival must be studied (see *Mikhtam* and Meiri). Rashi here states that the alarm is sounded during Passover itself. Others maintain that if Passover has arrived or if it is near the Festival, and rain has not yet fallen in sufficient quantities for the trees, the alarm is sounded immediately (Rambam *Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Ta'anit* 2:17).

Before the festival of *Sukkot* – בפרוס החג: Many authorities understand the term Festival in this context in its usual sense, as a reference to the festival of *Sukkot* (Rambam *Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Ta'anit* 2:17). However, some commentaries ask: How is it possible that the alarm was not sounded all summer long, when rainfall was most desperately needed, but only at the end of the year, near *Sukkot* (Ritva)? The Ritva explains that although the need for rain is greatest during the summer months, prayers for rain cannot be offered then, as one should not pray for a miracle. However, with the approach of *Sukkot*, prayers may be offered, as at that time the water shortage has already been felt for a long time and the rainy season is now at hand. Others add that the water shortage is really felt only near *Sukkot*, as all summer long there is still some water left in the storage cisterns from the previous winter (Ran). Alternatively, the term Festival means the festival of *Shavuot*, at the start of the summer (Ritva). Indeed, in the Jerusalem Talmud it is stated explicitly that the alarm is sounded for cisterns, ditches, and caves near the festival of *Shavuot*.

BACKGROUND

Downpour – שפיכותא: Large amounts of heavy rainfall in a short period of time can lead to flooding, which can cause extensive damage to crops and can even wash away much of the topsoil. There are records of over 100 mm of rain falling in an hour and a half in Eretz Yisrael. Although this rainfall fills wells, it is harmful to all forms of vegetation.

LANGUAGE

District [*iparkheya*] – אפרכיא: From the Greek *ἐπαρχία*, *eparkhia*, a district.

Diphtheria – אֲסָקָרָא: If a community is struck by a particular illness, e.g., diphtheria, and people are dying from the disease, the alarm is sounded and fasts are proclaimed (*Shulḥan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim 576:5*).

Over locusts, for any amount – יַעַל הַגּוֹבַאי בְּכָל שְׁהוּא: If even one type of destructive locust is sighted, the alarm is sounded and fasts are proclaimed. If a less devastating type of locust is sighted, special prayers are recited but the alarm is not sounded and fasts are not proclaimed. Nowadays, we are unable to distinguish between the various types of locusts, and therefore the alarm is sounded in all cases (*Shulḥan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim 576:9*).

BACKGROUND

Diphtheria [askara] – אֲסָקָרָא: The translation of *askara* as diphtheria is supported by the descriptions of this illness elsewhere in the Gemara. This disease starts from the mouth and throat. In certain cases, when it spreads to the back of the throat, diphtheria can cause death by strangulation. It can also spread to other areas of the body and even weaken the heart. This disease afflicts mainly children under the age of ten (see 27b).

Baked properly, etc. – כּוֹר וְכִי נֶאֱפִיט כְּתִיקְנָה: When there is enough time to prepare and bake dough, it rises at the right temperature and it rises well. However, when bread must be prepared in a hurry, the dough will not be kneaded properly, and it will therefore contain lumps of flour. In an attempt to prepare the bread quicker, it will also be baked at too high a temperature, which will result in bread that is only partially baked or burned. Likewise, periods of rainfall that have long gaps between them and rain that falls after the proper time can prevent plants from sprouting. Even those plants that do sprout often do not flourish due to the shortage of water. Consequently, even if the overall quantity of rain is the same, only the proper distribution of rainfall throughout the season can guarantee adequate growth.

ואֲסָקָרָא. בְּזִמְנֵי שִׁישׁ בְּהַ מִיתָה, מִתְרִיעִין עָלֶיהָ. בְּזִמְנֵי שָׂאִין בְּהַ מִיתָה, אִין מִתְרִיעִין עָלֶיהָ. וּמִתְרִיעִין עַל הַגּוֹבַאי בְּכָל שְׁהוּא. רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן אֱלֵעָזָר אָמַר: אֵף עַל הַחֲגָב.

תָּנוּ רַבָּנַן: מִתְרִיעִין עַל הָאֵילָנוֹת בְּשָׂאֵר שְׁנֵי שָׁבוּעַ. עַל הַבּוֹרוֹת, וְעַל הַשִּׁיחִין, וְעַל הַמְעָרוֹת, אֲפִילוּ בְּשַׁבְּעֵיתָ. רַבִּין שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אָמַר: אֵף עַל הָאֵילָנוֹת בְּשַׁבְּעֵיתָ, מִפְּנֵי שִׁישׁ בְּהֵן פְּרִנְסָה לְעֵנִיִּים.

תָּנוּ אִידְךָ: מִתְרִיעִין עַל הָאֵילָנוֹת בְּשָׂאֵר שְׁנֵי שָׁבוּעַ. עַל הַבּוֹרוֹת, עַל הַשִּׁיחִין, וְעַל הַמְעָרוֹת, אֲפִילוּ בְּשַׁבְּעֵיתָ. רַבִּין שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אָמַר: אֵף עַל הָאֵילָנוֹת. מִתְרִיעִין עַל הַסְּפִיחִין בְּשַׁבְּעֵיתָ, מִפְּנֵי שִׁישׁ בְּהֵן פְּרִנְסָה לְעֵנִיִּים.

תָּנוּ: אָמַר רַבִּי אֱלֵעָזָר בֶּן פְּרָטָא: מִיִּם שְׁחָרַב בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, נִעְשׂוּ גְשָׁמִים צִימוּקִין לְעוֹלָם. יֵשׁ שָׁנָה שְׁגִשְׁמִיָּה מְרוּבִין, וְיֵשׁ שָׁנָה שְׁגִשְׁמִיָּה מוּעָטִין. יֵשׁ שָׁנָה שְׁגִשְׁמִיָּה יוֹרְדִין בְּזִמְנָהּ, וְיֵשׁ שָׁנָה שָׂאִין גְּשָׁמִיָּה יוֹרְדִין בְּזִמְנָהּ.

שָׁנָה שְׁגִשְׁמִיָּה יוֹרְדִין בְּזִמְנָהּ – לָמָּה הוּא דוֹמָה? לְעֵבֶד שְׁנָתָן לוֹ רַבּוֹ פְּרִנְסָתוֹ בְּאֶחָד בְּשַׁבָּת. נִמְצְאָת עֵיסָה נֶאֱפִיט כְּתִיקְנָה וְנֶאֱכָלָת כְּתִיקְנָה. שָׁנָה שָׂאִין גְּשָׁמִיָּה יוֹרְדִין בְּזִמְנָהּ – לָמָּה הוּא דוֹמָה? לְעֵבֶד שְׁנָתָן לוֹ רַבּוֹ פְּרִנְסָתוֹ בְּעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת. נִמְצְאָת עֵיסָה נֶאֱפִיט שְׁלֵא כְּתִיקְנָה וְנֶאֱכָלָת שְׁלֵא כְּתִיקְנָה.

And with regard to a plague of diphtheria,^{8b} when it has the potential to cause death they sound the alarm over it, but when it does not have the potential to cause death they do not sound the alarm over it. And they sound the alarm over the arrival of locusts, for any amount,⁹ as it is likely that more locusts are on the way. However, they do not sound the alarm over the arrival of grasshoppers. Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: They sound the alarm even over grasshoppers, as they too can cause a great deal of damage if they swarm in large numbers.

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: They sound the alarm over trees during the other six years of the seven-year Sabbatical cycle, when the earth is tilled, but not during the Sabbatical Year, when one must refrain from working the land. However, for cisterns, ditches, and caves, they sound the alarm even in the Sabbatical Year. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: Even for trees they sound the alarm in the Sabbatical Year, because they serve as sustenance for the poor.⁹ Since the poor rely on these trees for their food in the Sabbatical Year, they will lose their means of subsistence if it does not rain.

It is taught in another *baraita*: They sound the alarm over trees during the other years of the Sabbatical cycle, and for cisterns, ditches and caves they sound the alarm even in the Sabbatical Year. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: Even for trees. Furthermore, they sound the alarm for aftergrowths of crops that have grown of their own accord in the Sabbatical Year, because they serve as sustenance for the poor, as it is permitted to eat aftergrowths.

It is taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Elazar ben Perata said: Since the day that the Temple was destroyed,⁹ rain has been meager, i.e., overall, not enough has fallen in the world. There are years whose rains are abundant, and there are years whose rains are scarce. There are years whose rains fall in their proper time, and there are years whose rains do not fall in their proper time.

With regard to a year whose rains fall in their proper time, to what may it be compared? To a servant whose master gave him his weekly portion on Sunday. It is thereby found that his dough is baked properly⁸ throughout the week, and it is eaten properly, as he has a sufficient amount. Conversely, with regard to a year whose rains do not fall in their proper time, to what may it be compared? To a servant whose master gave him his portion on Shabbat eve, when there is insufficient time to prepare it fully. It is thereby found that his dough is baked improperly, and it is eaten improperly.

NOTES

Because they serve as sustenance for the poor – מִפְּנֵי שִׁישׁ: The *tanna'im* dispute whether the alarm is sounded in the Sabbatical Year only for trees or even for the aftergrowth of vegetables and grain planted during the previous year. Some commentaries explain that this dispute reflects a more fundamental dispute with regard to the rabbinic prohibition against benefiting from the aftergrowth of crops planted during the sixth year. Did the Sages prohibit the consumption of this produce entirely to people of means, or did they merely prohibit its purchase from one who is suspected of having planted during the Sabbatical Year? (See Rosh on *Shevi'it* 9:1, Rid, and *Gevurat Ari*).

According to the versions of the *baraita* found in the Babylonian Talmud, the alarm is sounded even in the Sabbatical Year if there is no rain, as the produce growing on the trees and the

aftergrowths of the previous year's crops, which were supposed to be eaten during the Sabbatical Year, are an important source of sustenance for the poor. However, in the *Tosefta* and the Jerusalem Talmud, the *baraita* states that the alarm is sounded on account of drought even during the Sabbatical Year for the benefit of others. In the Jerusalem Talmud, two explanations of this cryptic term: Others, are cited: Some say that the alarm is sounded for the benefit of gentiles, who are not bound by the restrictions of the Sabbatical Year. Others explain that it is sounded for the benefit of those Jews who are suspected of violating the restrictions and planting during the Sabbatical Year, so that at least the crops should not fail.

Since the day that the Temple was destroyed – מִיִּם שְׁחָרַב: Some commentaries explain that when the Temple

was standing, the High Priest offered a special prayer on Yom Kippur that rain should fall at the appointed time and in abundant amounts. However, after the Temple was destroyed, that prayer was no longer recited, and since then rain has fallen at irregular intervals and in disappointing quantities (Maharsha).

Others have a different reading of this passage: Since the day that the Temple was destroyed, rainfall has become a means of judging the world. While the Temple stood, the generation could see whether it was innocent or guilty by means of the scarlet thread that hung in the Temple. On Yom Kippur, this thread would either turn white, as a sign that the people's sins had been forgiven, or remain scarlet, which indicated that they had not. Since the Temple was destroyed, rain has become the primary test by which a generation can see whether it has been vindicated or found guilty in the eyes of God (*Arukh*).

רִיחִים טוֹחֲנוֹת מִן הַכּוֹר – The mill grinds from a *kor* – Whenever grain is milled, a certain amount is lost. Some of this loss occurs when the millstones themselves, which must be rough enough to grind the grain, fill with pieces of the ground grain. This wastage can be reduced by the proper adjustment of the space between the millstones, but some very fine flour invariably blows away. Since part of this loss is a constant amount, if only a small quantity of grain is ground, the percentage of the loss is higher, i.e., the loss will be higher in proportion to the total amount of grain milled.

עִסָּה אוֹכֶלֶת מִן הַכּוֹר – Dough is diminished from a *kor* – In the preparation of dough, some flour is always spilled or scattered, while a certain amount of dough will stick to the sides of the vessel. In this case too, the percentage of loss is greater when a small amount of flour is mixed.

LANGUAGE

נַקְדִּימוֹן – Nakdimon – Apparently from the Greek *Νικodemus, Nikodemus*, which means the people's victory.

הֶגְמוֹן – Officer [*hegemon*] – From the Greek *ἡγεμών, hegemon*, which means a leader, especially a military leader. It came to refer specifically to Roman prefects. In the Talmud, the term means ruler or high official.

PERSONALITIES

נַקְדִּימוֹן בֶּן גּוּרְיוֹן – Nakdimon ben Gurion – Nakdimon ben Gurion is described in several places in the sources as one of the wealthiest residents of Jerusalem at the time of the destruction of the Temple. He is possibly mentioned in the works of Josephus. As stated in the Gemara, his Hebrew name was apparently *Buni*, while he also had a Greek name, as was customary at the time. This Greek name was expounded on by the Sages as a way of memorializing this incident.

NOTES

שְׁתַּיִם עֲשָׂרָה עֵינֹת מַיִם – Twelve wells – Some commentaries write that Nakdimon asked specifically for twelve wells of water, in the hope that the merits of the twelve tribes would help him to repay the loan. If their merits proved insufficient, perhaps the twelve talents of silver would atone for their transgressions (Maharsha).

שָׁנָה שְׂגֹשְׁמִיָּה מְרוּבִין – לְמָה הוּא דוֹמָה? לְעֵבֶד שָׁנָתוֹ לֹא רַבּוֹ פְּרֻנְסָתוֹ בְּבַת אַחַת. נִמְצָאוּ רִיחִים טוֹחֲנוֹת מִן הַכּוֹר מֵה שְׂטוֹחֲנוֹת מִן הַקֶּבֶב, וְנִמְצָאוּ עִסָּה אוֹכֶלֶת מִן הַכּוֹר בְּמֵה אוֹכֶלֶת מִן הַקֶּבֶב.

שָׁנָה שְׂגֹשְׁמִיָּה מוּעָטִין – לְמָה הוּא דוֹמָה? לְעֵבֶד שָׁנָתוֹ לֹא רַבּוֹ פְּרֻנְסָתוֹ מֵעַט מְעַט. נִמְצָאוּ רִיחִים טוֹחֲנוֹת מִן הַכּוֹר טוֹחֲנוֹת מִן הַקֶּבֶב, וְנִמְצָאוּ עִסָּה בְּמֵה שְׂטוֹחֲנוֹת מִן הַכּוֹר אוֹכֶלֶת מִן הַקֶּבֶב.

דְּבַר אַחֵר: בְּזִמְנֵי שְׂגֹשְׁמִיָּה מְרוּבִין, לְמָה הוּא דוֹמָה? לְאִדָּם שְׂמִינְיָה אֶת הַטֵּיט. אִם יֵשׁ לוֹ מַיִם רַבִּים, מַיִם אֵינָן בְּלִין וְהַטֵּיט מְגוֹבֵל יָפֵה. אִם יֵשׁ לוֹ מַיִם מוּעָטִין, מַיִם כָּלִים וְהַטֵּיט אֵינוֹ מְתַגַּבֵּל יָפֵה.

תָּנוּ רַבָּנֵינוּ: פְּעַם אַחַת עָלוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לְרַגֵּל לְיִרוּשָׁלַיִם, וְלֹא הָיָה לָהֶם מַיִם לְשִׁתּוֹת. הֵלֵךְ נַקְדִּימוֹן בֶּן גּוּרְיוֹן אַצֵּל הַגְּמוֹן אַחֵר, אָמַר לוֹ: הַלְיֹנִי שְׁתַּיִם עֲשָׂרָה מְעֵינֹת מַיִם לְעוֹלֵי רַגְלִים, וְאִנִּי אֶתֵּן לָךְ שְׁתַּיִם עֲשָׂרָה עֵינֹת מַיִם. וְאִם אֵינִי נוֹתֵן לָךְ, הֲרֵינִי נוֹתֵן לָךְ שְׁתַּיִם עֲשָׂרָה כֶּכֶר כֶּסֶף. וְקָבַע לוֹ זְמַן.

בַּיּוֹם שֶׁהִגִּיעַ הַזְּמַן וְלֹא יָרְדוּ גְשָׁמִים, בְּשַׁחְרִית שָׁלַח לוֹ: שִׁגְר לִי אוֹ מַיִם אוֹ מְעוֹת שֵׁשׁ לִי בְּיָדְךָ. שָׁלַח לוֹ: עַדְיִין יֵשׁ לִי זְמַן, כָּל הַיּוֹם כּוֹלֵל שְׁלִי הוּא. בְּצַהֲרָיִים שָׁלַח לוֹ: שִׁגְר לִי אוֹ מַיִם אוֹ מְעוֹת שֵׁשׁ לִי בְּיָדְךָ. שָׁלַח לוֹ: עַדְיִין יֵשׁ לִי שְׁהוֹת בַּיּוֹם. בְּמַנְחָה שָׁלַח לוֹ: שִׁגְר לִי מַיִם אוֹ מְעוֹת שֵׁשׁ לִי בְּיָדְךָ. שָׁלַח לוֹ: עַדְיִין יֵשׁ לִי שְׁהוֹת בַּיּוֹם. לְגַלְגַּל עָלָיו אוֹתוֹ הַגְּמוֹן, אָמַר: כָּל הַשָּׁנָה כּוֹלֵה לֹא יָרְדוּ גְשָׁמִים

With regard to a year whose rains are abundant, to what may it be compared? To a servant whose master gave him his portion for a long period of time all at once. He performs all of his milling at one time, and it is therefore found that the mill grinds and produces waste from a *kor*⁸ of produce in the same amount as it grinds and produces waste from the much smaller *kav* of produce. During each milling process, the same amount of flour goes to waste. Consequently, milling a large amount of flour in a single milling process preserves flour. And similarly, it is found that dough is diminished from a *kor*,⁸ as it diminishes from a *kav*.

In contrast, with regard to a year whose rains are scarce, to what may it be compared? To a servant whose master gave him his portion little by little. It is thereby found that the amount that the mill would have ground from a *kor* of produce is that which in practice it grinds and produces from each *kav*. It is likewise found that the dough that would have been diminished from a *kor* is the same amount that is diminished from a *kav*. In sum, one retains less dough when given his sustenance little by little.

Alternatively, when its rains are abundant, to what may this year be compared? To a person who kneads clay. If he has a lot of water, his water is not used up and the clay will be well kneaded. If he has only a little water, the water will be used up and the clay will not be well kneaded.

§ The Sages taught: Once all the Jewish people ascended for the pilgrimage Festival to Jerusalem and there was not enough water for them to drink. Nakdimon¹ ben Gurion,² one of the wealthy citizens of Jerusalem, went to a certain gentile officer [*hegemon*]³ and said to him: Lend me twelve wells⁴ of water for the pilgrims, and I will give back to you twelve wells of water. And if I do not give them to you, I will give you twelve talents of silver. And the officer set him a time limit for returning the water.

When the set time arrived and no rain had fallen, in the morning the official sent a message to Nakdimon: Send me either the water or the coins that you owe me. Nakdimon sent a message to him: I still have time, as the entire day is mine. At noontime the official again sent a message to him: Send me either the water or the coins that you owe me. Nakdimon sent a message to him: I still have time left in the day. In the afternoon he sent a message to him: Send me either the water or the coins that you owe me. Nakdimon sent a message to him: I still have time left in the day. That officer ridiculed him, saying: Throughout the entire year rain has not fallen,

Perek III

Daf 20 Amud a

וְעַכְשָׁיו יָרְדוּ גְשָׁמִים? נִכְנַס לְבֵית הַמְּרֻחָץ בְּשִׂמְחָה. עַד שֶׁהָאֲדוֹן נִכְנַס בְּשִׂמְחָתוֹ לְבֵית הַמְּרֻחָץ, נַקְדִּימוֹן נִכְנַס לְבֵית הַמְּקַדֵּשׁ בְּשִׂמְחָה עֲצוּב. נִתְעַטַּף וְעָמַד בַּתְּפִלָּה.

and now it will rain? He entered the bathhouse in a state of joy, anticipating the large sum of money he was about to receive. As the master entered the bathhouse⁵ in his joy, Nakdimon entered the Temple in a state of sadness. He wrapped himself in his prayer shawl and stood in prayer.

NOTES

נִכְנַס... לְבֵית הַמְּרֻחָץ – The master entered the bathhouse – The Roman official added insult to injury by entering the bathhouse when the Jews who had arrived in Jerusalem for the Festival did

not even have water to drink. In turn, Nakdimon intended to offend the official by demanding payment for the extra rainwater that had been added to his wells (Maharsha).